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TOP[®] 100

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Lothar Späth

The 100 most
innovative medium-
sized businesses





TRACOE is one of the world's leading manufacturers of tracheostomy tubes, such as those used for long-term ventilation after operations.

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TRACOE

S. Köhler and Prof. Dr. F. Waldeck,
Managing Directors



*'New ideas will only emerge
and evolve into practical
innovations if the necessary
expertise is available.'*

Better than any adventure

Tracheostomies are a standard medical procedure in hospitals today. But even into the 20th century, they remained to be a rather adventurous operation. TRACOE medical GmbH's history began in 1958 with the development of a plastic tube that was more comfortable for patients. Since then, the company's product range has steadily expanded thanks to a productive climate of innovation and broad-reaching innovations marketing.

A fertile climate of innovation calls for the freedom to be creative. TRACOE, for example, has set up 'play areas' for development department employees where they can go during working hours to come up with new ideas outside the framework of the development programme. These creativity areas have generated successful projects. Each employee submits about three ideas for improvement per year, of which 40 per cent are put into practice. One example is the double cuff, which prevents fluid contaminated with bacteria from flowing into the lower respiratory tract where it can cause pneumonia.

A wealth of creativity

Evaluating and rewarding good ideas itself is a standard procedure at TRACOE. A matrix is used to rate the suggestions as 'low', 'medium' or 'high' in categories such as 'significance of the idea' and 'creativity of the solution'. Employees are rewarded based on the evaluation. For suggested improvements that will generate savings of more than €3,000, the management team

compares the savings and cost forecasts over three years. The employee whose idea it was receives a percentage of this as a bonus. The interdisciplinary innovation project teams are also a plentiful source of creativity. Their members represent the development, production, quality management, sales and marketing departments.

Requirements analysis

TRACOE has made marketing a vital element of its innovation process. New projects are always discussed with marketing staff at a very early stage, who often accompany the visits to hospitals in Germany and abroad. In addition, TRACOE identifies customers' requirements by analysing reports from field staff. The reports provide insights into the usability and functioning of the products as well as any problems. When the company launches new or improved products, it hands out special questionnaires which can gauge customer satisfaction. This ensures that medical adventures remain firmly a thing of the past.

TRACOE medical GmbH

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Address

Reichsforststraße 32
60528 Frankfurt
Phone +49 69 665668-0
Fax +49 69 665668-10
www.tracoe.com

Email

info@tracoe.com
Employees (Germany)
101
Sector
Medical Technology